

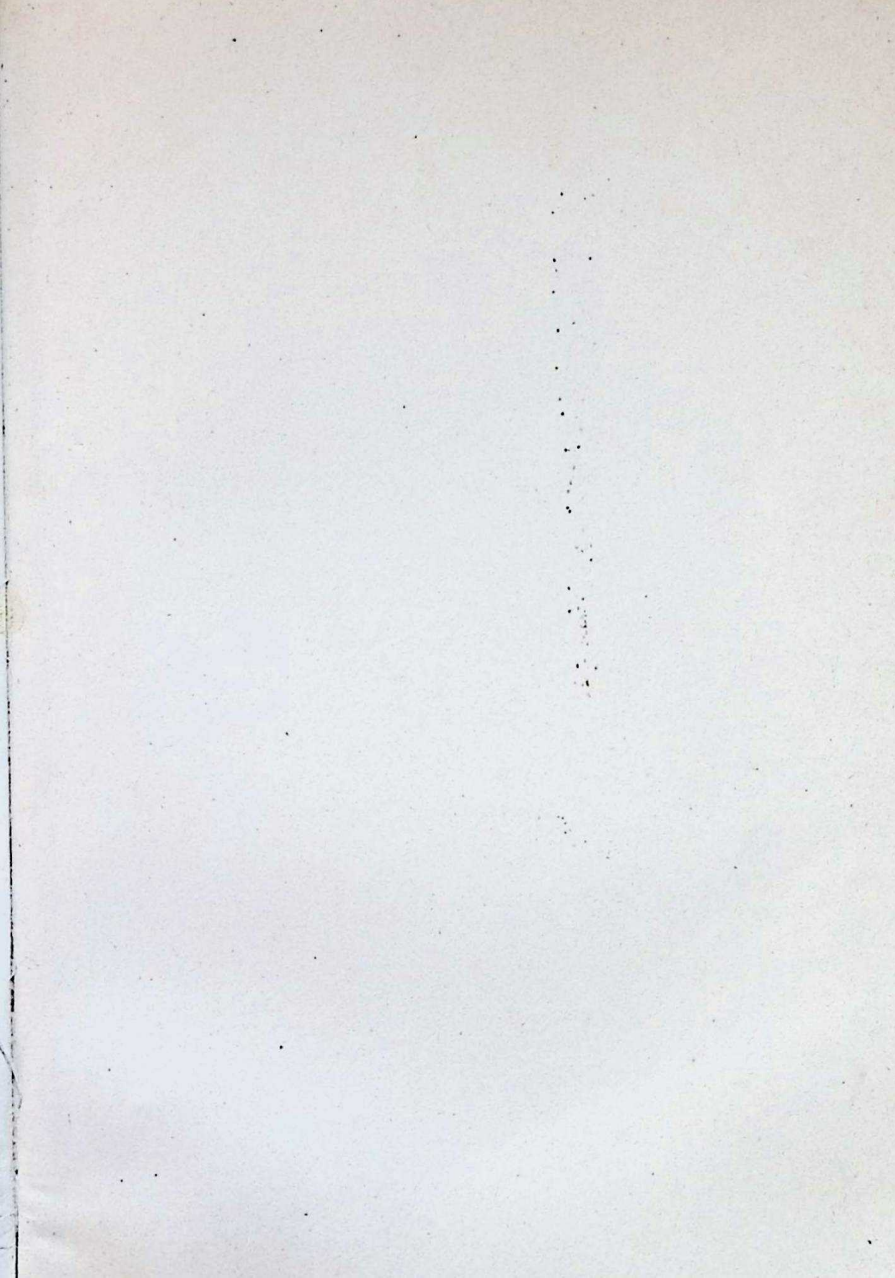
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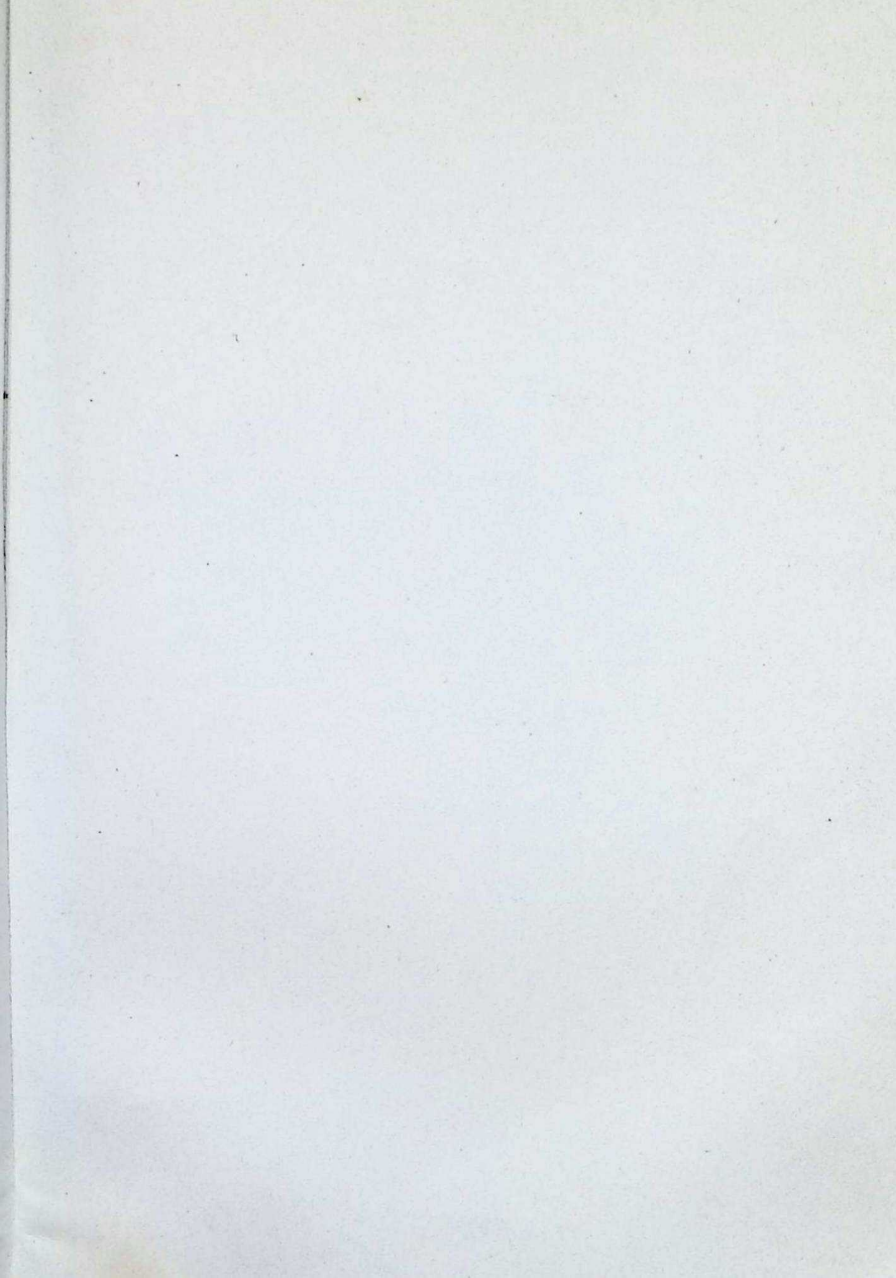
CH'AN

講嚴聖釋

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Preface

This book consists of seven lectures given by Ch'an Master Dr. Sheng-yen at the Cathedral of the Pines in New Hampshire, the Temple of Enlightenment in the Bronx and the Ch'an Meditation Center in Queens, New York. The first lecture deals with Buddhism in general, and not specifically with Ch'an Buddhism. The second lecture is a general description of some of the physical, mental, and spiritual benefits one may derive from Ch'an meditation. The third lecture is an outline of the stages of progress practitioners can expect to experience from the time they begin to meditate to the moment they first enter the door of Ch'an (there are many terms describing this experience, including: seeing one's self-nature, true nature, or original nature and experiencing *kensho* or enlightenment). Since the practice of Ch'an does not begin until one has entered the door of Ch'an for the first time, this lecture is not a discussion of Ch'an; rather, it is a "map" of what one might encounter on the journey leading up to the door. Practitioners who have not yet seen their original nature can refer to the "map" to gauge how far they are from the door, and

to form a clearer idea about where, or what, the door is. The fourth lecture discusses the *kung-ans* (koans) of Ch'an and includes experiences of modern day practitioners. It gives the reader a flavor of what a practitioner experiences just before entering the door of Ch'an as well as what he experiences upon entering. It describes various levels of awakening and explains methods used by Ch'an masters. The last three lectures explore other facets of Ch'an practice, and are entitled "Ch'an Sickness," "Selecting and Studying Under a Master," and "No Anger or Love Between Master and Disciple."

Biographical Notes

Ch'an Master Dr. Sheng-yen was born on mainland China in the countryside near Shanghai. At the age of 13, he became a monk in a local temple. In 1949, he joined the Nationalist Army and left the mainland. Arriving in Taiwan, he remained in the service as a clerk to fulfill his military obligation. Afterwards, he again donned the robes of a monk and joined the Buddhist Sangha.

He diligently practiced the methods and precepts of Ch'an as well as studied Buddhist *sutras*, *sastras*, commentaries, and other related works. He then retreated to the mountains of southern Taiwan and spent six years living alone, single-mindedly practicing Ch'an. In the late 1960's, Master Sheng-yen went to Japan, where he studied and received a Doctorate degree from Rissho University. While in Japan, he also continued his practice of Ch'an, practicing under several Japanese Zen masters.

In the winter of 1975, Master Sheng-yen arrived in America and began lecturing on Buddhist principles and teaching Ch'an meditation at the Temple of Enlightenment in the Bronx, New York. He is unique in

his ability to blend the flavor and style of Chinese Ch'an with Japanese Zen, joining flexibility and harmony with power and drive. He now has many students both in Taiwan and New York. In 1978, he and his students opened the Ch'an Meditation Center in Queens, New York.

The Fundamental Concepts of Buddhism

Ladies and gentlemen, this is the first time I have had the pleasure of meeting with the majority of you. Buddhists believe that life is eternal, spanning the beginningless past and the infinite future. Life appears to be impermanent only when seen from the point of view of its fragments. Birth and death are like getting up in the morning and going to sleep at night. The next day you rise again, only to go back to sleep the following night. The days are different, the world constantly changes, and everything about you changes, but what you conceive of as being your self remains the same. So birth arises at the completion of death, and death is just the beginning of another birth. Therefore, from the viewpoint of Buddhism, birth may not be a happy event, nor death a sad one.

Viewing the course of countless past births and deaths in this perspective, we see that not only are we friends now, but we also must have been friends in the past, regardless of your present nationality, race, social background, or religion. Therefore, I have the

pleasure today of seeing old friends whom I have not seen for a long, long time, and the joy in my heart is beyond words. As long as all the necessary *hetu-pratyaya*—factors of dependent origination, or causes and conditions—are present, we will continue to see each other.

The Buddhist term *hetu-pratyaya* contains no mystery: *hetu* means “factor” or “cause,” and the interrelationship between two or more *hetus* is called *pratyaya*. For example, Buddhists decided to hold a special service in celebration of the bicentennial of the American Revolution. The trustees and management of the Cathedral of the Pines requested that we offer a Buddhist service. You accepted the invitation and are attending this event. These *hetus*, or causes, have jointly brought about this great gathering. Such an event, in Buddhism, is called the maturity of *hetu-pratyaya*—the coming together of causes and conditions.

The concept of *hetu-pratyaya* is closely related to another Buddhist theory: cause and effect, or cause and consequence. When various factors interact with one another, results emerge. Using this theory of cause and effect in regard to past and future births and deaths, Buddhists explain different conditions in life—rich or poor, noble or lowly, fortunate or unfortunate—as being the result of one’s own deeds.

Therefore, if you are a Buddhist, you will treasure your good fortune when you have it, and you will face

adversity without complaint, striving courageously to improve your lot, because you know that both good and bad fortune are nothing more than the results of good and bad deeds performed in the past.

Some people may be interested in the Buddhist view concerning the creation of the world, as well as its future destiny. Things are created by *hetu-pratyaya* and extinguished by *hetu-pratyaya*. The arising of causes and conditions, the parting of causes and conditions, and the changes in causes and conditions create the phenomena of birth and death, and subsequent rebirth and death. This is true of human beings and families, and also of races, nations, worlds and universes. This world has arisen because the numerous living beings born in it have performed similar deeds in the past, even though they may have lived in other worlds. As living beings born into this world have changed many times, so too has the world changed, and it will continue to change until it perishes.

From the viewpoint of *hetu-pratyaya* and of cause and effect, Buddhism tells us that our world is a creation of all the living beings that are born into it. As soon as no more life needs to come into this world, the world will exist no longer. According to the *sutras*, when this world vanishes in space, there will still be innumerable worlds in which living beings can dwell. So no one need worry about the future of this world.

After the Buddha's enlightenment, his first

utterance of truth was, "All living beings have Buddha-nature within them." This is the essence of Mahayana Buddhism. There are three main Buddhist philosophical schools that try to explain the concept of Buddha-nature:

(1) The first is the Vijnana-matra school, based on the *Vijnana-matrasiddhi-sastra*. This school maintains that one can perceive Buddha-nature by analyzing phenomena. It holds that all the phenomena of the universe are the manifestations of the karmic consciousness of sentient beings, accumulated from their deeds. The basic nature of karmic consciousness is neither good nor evil; good and evil are the products of a mind defiled by discrimination and attachment. When defilement is turned into wisdom, Buddha-nature is revealed.

(2) The second is the Tathagata-garbha school, based on the *Mahayanottara-tantra-sastra*. This school maintains that Buddha-nature can be perceived from the fundamental reality. It holds that the basic nature of all living beings, sages and ordinary people alike, is identical. The basic nature is eternal, perfectly quiescent, and pure. However, the basic nature of an ordinary person is obscured, like gold buried in rock. Sages, through practice, dig out the basic nature from the depths of the mind defiled by delusion. This basic nature is Buddha-nature.

(3) The third is the Madhyamika school, based on the *Pranneyaya-mula-sastra-tika*. This school maintains that Buddha-nature can be perceived from the theory of *hetu-pratyaya*. It holds that anything created by *hetu-pratyaya* is void, because there is not a single phenomenon or concept in the world that is eternal and immutable, including the concept of Buddha-nature. Only voidness—and even the concept of voidness is void—can be called true freedom and infinity. Madhyamika maintains that the supramundane is not apart from the mundane; supramundane and mundane differ according to whether one has or has not attained liberation by freeing one's self from one's defiled mind. An ordinary person wants to become a Buddha in order to eliminate suffering and the bonds of rebirth. Yet, after an ordinary person has become a Buddha, he returns to help enlighten all living beings by resuming activities among ordinary people. This is the theory of Madhyamika: "neither void nor real."

Unfortunately, time does not permit me to introduce to you in detail the actual methods of Buddhist practice. But I do believe that when *hetu-pratyaya* matures, you will have the opportunity to learn them. May you all become Buddhas soon. Thank you.

Delivered at Cathedral of the Pines, Ridge, New Hampshire
August 15, 1976

Translated from the Chinese by Kang Chen

The Benefits of Ch'an Meditation

I. Ch'an Meditation is Wealth:

In recent centuries, the speedy advance of science has solved many problems stemming from the natural and social environment, as well as from individual physical and psychological conditions. However, as material civilization progresses, unsolved problems have actually increased. In fact, no matter how much progress we make, the problems that arise from natural causes can never be completely overcome. Technology will not be able to stop the gradual waning of solar energy; thus the decline and eventual death of the earth seems inevitable. Since we cannot completely control our bodily functions to prevent the aging of our physical organs, the death of the physical body also seems inevitable. Nevertheless, before the earth becomes uninhabitable, we should try to make our environment a better place to live in, and while our bodies are still alive, we should find ways to improve our physical and mental health, so that we can live more comfortably and happily. Although these are

direct challenges to modern science, we need not rely totally on science for solutions. In fact, the work of science depends on the wisdom and physical capabilities of humankind, and Ch'an meditation is the best means to uncover the supreme wisdom and physical capacities which are hidden deep in each person's mind and body.

Although Ch'an meditation is, historically speaking, the wisdom of the Orient, all great religious leaders, philosophers, scientists or artists, in both the East and West, owe their greatness more or less to the function of Ch'an. They might not have used the specific methods and postures of Ch'an meditation—they may not even have heard of the term Ch'an—but their ability to use their innate wisdom is equivalent to the function of Ch'an meditation. They were just not aware of it. Because they were gifted, they were able to derive some benefit from the function of Ch'an, naturally and unconsciously, and this made them outstanding in their lives and work.

Since Ch'an meditation is the best way to uncover and develop one's hidden wisdom and physical capabilities, it is not difficult to transform an ordinary person into a great one, a dullard into a genius, a physically weak person into a strong one, and to improve even the brilliant and strong, thus enabling all people to attain perfection. Therefore, Ch'an meditation is the best means to strengthen human life, develop society, and improve the entire environment.

Ch'an meditation can strengthen your determination and improve your character; it can help you gain new vigor physically, new hope psychologically, and a fresh perception and understanding of the surrounding environment. Through Ch'an meditation you will come to realize how fortunate, how free, and how full of potential you are.

The effect of Ch'an comes from concentration of the mind on one point—either abstract or material. It can be achieved while walking, standing, sitting, or lying down—in deep thought, silent prayer, worship, recitation, or even through close observation and mindful listening. In other words, when the mind is focused on one and only one thing, it is possible to receive the benefits of Ch'an. But receiving the benefit of Ch'an under such circumstances is only accidental. It does not happen to many people, and, when it does, those few do not know how to repeat the experience. Through Ch'an meditation, one can receive these benefits regularly. The Ch'an experience is a treasure that is accessible to every individual who wishes to accomplish it.

II. The Great Value of Life as a Human Being:

In seeking the experience of Ch'an, you do not have to assume any specific posture. Anyone—the sick, the handicapped, athletes, businessmen, laborers—can follow the methods taught by Ch'an masters; anyone

can practice, from a few minutes to several hours a day, whether waiting at a bus stop, sitting in a car or office, or relaxing at home.

The most effective method is, of course, sitting in the full lotus posture. However, to become accustomed to sitting in the full lotus posture, a beginner must be psychologically prepared to tolerate pain and numbness in the legs. Most people are inherently afraid of pain, thus overcoming the initial discomfort in the legs is a difficult obstacle for the beginner to hurdle. With perseverance, one can win this battle, and in doing so, overcome one's inner cowardice, fear of pain and fear of accepting a challenge. This in itself is a giant leap forward, though you may not believe it.

Of all animals, only humans can sit in a full lotus posture. Thus, the method of Ch'an meditation is designed for humankind only, and only humans can enjoy its benefits. We ought to congratulate ourselves for being born as human beings, and we should treasure our bodies.

Humans can derive three main benefits through Ch'an meditation: (1) a strong body; (2) an alert mind; (3) a purified personality.

Sakyamuni Buddha often praised the preciousness of human birth when speaking to his disciples. He stressed that of all sentient beings, including those in heaven and in hell, those with human bodies are most qualified to learn and practice Buddhism.

3. Ch'an Meditation as Viewed By Scientists:

Scientific examination of mental and physical reactions resulting from Ch'an meditation has revealed great benefits. In his book, *Zen Nosusume* (Reasons for Zen Practice), Dr. Sato Yukimasa, Professor of Psychology at Kyoto University in Japan, says that Ch'an meditation produces the following ten psychological effects:

- (1) an increase in patience;
- (2) a cure for allergies;
- (3) a strengthening of will power;
- (4) an improvement in reasoning power;
- (5) a refinement in personality;
- (6) a speedy calming of the mind;
- (7) the stabilization of emotions;
- (8) an increase in working spirit and efficiency;
- (9) the elimination of illness;
- (10) enlightenment.

According to the book, *Shin-I-Zen-Gaku* (Modern Medical Studies of Zen Practice) by Hasekawa U. Zaburo, M.D., Ch'an meditation is a remedy for these twelve diseases:

- (1) nervousness;
- (2) too much or too little gastric acid;
- (3) abdominal distention;
- (4) tuberculosis;

- (5) insomnia;
- (6) indigestion;
- (7) chronic prolapse of the stomach;
- (8) lack of tone of the stomach and intestine;
- (9) chronic constipation;
- (10) dysentery;
- (11) gallstones;
- (12) high blood pressure.

The highest objective of Ch'an meditation is enlightenment. However, if Ch'an masters were to talk about enlightenment to beginners, there would be few Ch'an practitioners. Only those rare individuals with deep karmic affinity for Buddhism would be interested. Therefore, talking about the physical and psychological benefits of Ch'an meditation and supporting such claims with scientific evidence is important and useful for beginning practitioners. For those who have experience in Ch'an meditation, these scientific reports serve no purpose.

4. The Assurance of a Serene Body and Mind:

In your daily life, you pay little attention to your own body and mind. Mentally, you do not know, nor do you have the time or discipline to examine, how many thoughts come and go in a day, or even in a second. You may catch some impressions of a few outstanding thoughts, but you are not clear at all about the

numerous trivial ones that pass like lightning. Physically, your cellular metabolism has not stopped for a moment. You may know it only because you have learned it, but you do not experience the process of your body's aging.

What is important is that we, who live in an industrial and technologically advanced world, must exert a high degree of mental and physical power all the time, whether in study or work, whether making a living or contributing to the welfare of others. Yet, few people realize that deep down at the bottom of our reservoir of energy there is a "hole" out of which is leaking a tremendous amount of energy. At the same time, our production of energy is far below our capabilities and needs. It is indeed a pity that we have not done everything we can to reduce the waste and increase the efficiency of our own mental and physical energy.

Through what "hole" does the leakage occur? It is through uncontrolled, distracting thoughts. These uncontrolled, distracting thoughts consume our physical power and lower our mental power. The worst of such thoughts are the strong desires of hatred, arrogance, or despair that stimulate emotion and thereby disturb the balanced functions of the physical organs. If you have learned the method of Ch'an meditation, you can reduce disorderly and useless distractions and constantly keep your mind in a restful state of clarity and coolness, so that it can fully function to its maximum potential.

Your mind will be able to effectively coordinate and balance the endocrine glands, sympathetic nervous system and parasympathetic nervous system. For instance, the pituitary gland, pineal gland, thyroid gland, and thymus gland of the sympathetic nervous system can constrict blood vessels, thus raising blood pressure and activating the stimulating mechanism of the body. The result is increased alertness and sensitivity. On the other hand, the adrenal gland, ovaries, testes, and pancreas of the parasympathetic nervous system can dilate blood vessels, thus lowering blood pressure and slowing down the stimulating mechanism of the body. The result is a stable and steady character. The combination of the advantages of these two sets of hormones help to form a balanced, harmonious personality, whereas a preponderance of either set creates a degree of imbalance in personality.

The pressures of work, excessive strain on the brain, and extreme excitement or anger caused by outside factors will cause constriction of the blood vessels, quickening of the pulse, heightening of blood pressure, and shortness of breath, thus resulting in such diseases as cerebral hemorrhage, insomnia, heart palpitation, ringing in the ears, nervousness, and indigestion. When your emotions are storming violently, the endocrine system loses its balance and toxic substances enter the blood stream. Under normal circumstances, the endocrine glands are more or less balanced, and this is conducive to a healthy body and

mind. Once the balance is lost, your health is in jeopardy. The effect of Ch'an meditation is to turn a disturbed emotion into an alert and calm mood. If you are alert and calm, danger will not trigger overt fear and happiness will not make you lose your composure; no gain will make you feel materially rich and no loss will make you feel poor; opposition will not frustrate you and flattery will not cloud your judgement. It assures you serenity in body and mind.

5. Harmony and Liberty of Body and Mind:

The sympathetic nervous system and the parasympathetic nervous system should be balanced and perform in harmony. Otherwise, you will be unhealthy in mental and character development, as well as suffer from physical disorders. If the sympathetic nervous system dominates the parasympathetic nervous system, then you will tend to be sensitive, selfish, restless, temperamental, and unfriendly. If the reverse is true, then you will be dull-minded, apathetic, lethargic, and resigned to fate.

A positively developed sympathetic nervous system will benefit the individual, and the good results that follow will produce skills and aptitudes that could lead one to become a lofty philosopher with high principles, a brilliant and firm military leader, or a keen-minded, critical scholar. On the other hand, a negatively developed sympathetic nervous system

could produce a self-centered, brutal, ruthless, obstinate person.

Developing the parasympathetic system in a positive direction also results in a good character, such as that of a compassionate religious leader, a magnanimous statesman, or a broad-minded artist; negatively, it may result in a person who is indifferent to good and evil, lacking in ideals and principles, sloppy, and irresponsibly carefree. Of course, the result tends to be negative when the development of the two nervous systems is unbalanced. Any good character in a person is in some degree due to the harmonious development of the two hormonal systems.

In short, Ch'an meditation offers methods to coordinate the functions of all organs, helping them to work normally and to achieve peak efficiency and performance. It starts with regulating the body, breathing, and the mind, so as to reduce the burden on the sympathetic nervous system, to weaken the impression of subjective views, and to expand the boundary of the self-centered ego, until eventually the existence of "self" is seemingly left behind. The subjective mind will then be merged with the objective mind. Although your mind will not be completely free from disturbances at this stage of practice, your physical and mental health will no longer be threatened. These disturbances, which are the excessive stress of subjective views, cause one to be greedy, full of hatred, lacking in self-examination, unforgiving to-

ward others, and irrational. Such a person thinks that no one should contradict his views. He stands opposed to everything. He craves and pursues things he does not have. If he loves the thing he comes to possess, then he fears losing it; if he hates the thing he comes to possess, then he fears not being able to get rid of it. One is vexed when one cannot attain or possess things, and one is vexed when one does attain or possess things, whether they are liked or disliked.

Ch'an meditation can gradually turn a person's self-centered, narrow, subjective world-view into an expansive, objective, unbounded view, and thus liberate the body and mind from the incessant suffering of subjective vexations.

6. Longevity and Happiness:

Breathing has much to do with relieving the burden of the sympathetic nervous system. Normally, a person uses his chest as the center of his breathing. A Ch'an meditator, however, shifts the center to his lower abdomen, which we refer to as *Tan-t'ien* or *Ch'i-hai*. The idea is to use abdominal pressure, coupled with mental control over the parasympathetic nervous system, as a method to enlarge blood vessels, lower blood pressure, relax nerves, and secrete more acetylcholine to attain tranquillity, relaxation, and relief from toxic substances. To shift the center of breathing from the chest to the lower abdomen is not

something that can be accomplished after a couple of days of practice. Some teachers of Hatha Yoga and *Ch'i-kung* suggest adopting abdominal breathing as a quick method, but it is not suited for everybody. If it is imposed on those who are not physically suited for it, due to hereditary or acquired causes, the practice can cause sickness. The safe way is to concentrate on breathing and allow the shift to occur naturally. Do not be anxious, anticipating quick results, but rather, maintain normal breathing and practice regularly and diligently. After a period of time, your breathing will naturally slow down and deepen. The length of each breath will extend, and at one point you will discover that your breathing has shifted to your lower abdomen.

Abdominal breathing can send blood from its storage in the liver and spleen to the heart, where the fullest use of it can be made. One third of a person's blood is kept in the liver and spleen, and the rest is equally divided between the heart, muscles and other organs. Ordinarily, the blood in the liver and spleen does not enter the circulatory system. Abdominal breathing is akin to adding an auxiliary heart to the human body. It substantially increases the volume of blood in the circulatory system, increases the assimilation of nutrients, and revives atrophied cell structures, enabling dying cells to regenerate. Because of this, Ch'an meditation can cure many ailments, including serious and chronic illnesses.

A person who suffers from a disease which is difficult to cure with medicine should try Ch'an meditation. Although Ch'an meditation cannot produce an immediate result, like removing an appendix, it can nevertheless stabilize emotions, reduce fear, and ease suffering. There is a limit to the life of a physical organ, and therefore to a human being. Ch'an meditation cannot make you immortal, but it can help you live longer and happier.

7. Cultivating Perfection:

Perfection can be cultivated through education, art, or religion, but these are not absolutely dependable. Some people, because of their irresistible desire for fame, wealth, and power, have become cultured by education, art, or religion. They may be known for noble deeds and exhibit (on the surface) a dignified character. Yet, hidden in their hearts lie secret, burning ambitions and hateful thoughts. We speak of this kind of person as having a dual personality. Therefore, in this world there are well-educated hypocrites and robed tyrants. Because religious doctrines, educational ethics, and artistic appreciation all come from external sources, even under authoritarian pressure they do not necessarily correspond to the inner character of each individual.

Ch'an meditation is the best way to cultivate perfection. It helps one transcend one's greed, hatred and

ignorance by means of discovering oneself from within, without any pressure from religious or sectarian dogma. A Ch'an meditator does not need ethics and morals. Religious dogma, ethical codes, and moral criteria change with time, the environment, the individual or culture. This is why new religions and new sects have emerged in recent decades like new bamboo shoots sprouting after a spring shower. Buddhism is no exception. Ch'an, though an offshoot of Buddhism, constitutes a method of practice that lasts through all seasons because of its independence from external conditions and its detachment from words.

Practicing Ch'an is like peeling a banana tree. When all your deluded notions of self have been peeled off layer after layer, you will not uncover a disguised and pretentious self, nor will you find a naked self. You start practicing with the intention of exposing yourself, and you end up realizing there is nothing at all for you to expose. Therefore, a Ch'an meditator need not hide anything from others, nor feel any external pressure during the course of reforming himself, nor need he struggle with pain, like a person undergoing surgery to remove a malignant tumor. Meditation will gradually reduce your wandering thoughts until you reach the selfless state. At that point you will instantly realize that your existence in the past was built on an accumulation of confused, false ideas; it is not your true self. Your true self is not a fixed, separate entity. It is inseparable from external

objects, and external objects are none other than the various parts of your own subjective existence. Therefore, you do not have to pursue anything or reject anything. All that needs to be done is to build your self into a better and more disciplined being.

A meditator, having reached this stage, becomes a person filled with deep compassion for all human beings, and in fact all sentient beings. His character is radiant and boundless. Externally he may display emotions, but they are for the sake of helping others and for spreading the teachings of Buddhadharma. Internally his mind is calm and clear, like the water in an autumn lake on a windless day. We call such a person an enlightened saint.

Sakyamuni Buddha once said, "Every sentient being has the wisdom and merit of a Buddha." If you long for the benefits that a meditator can obtain, your wish can definitely come true. The door of Ch'an is open to all, female and male, old and young, wise and dull, strong and weak, regardless of profession, position, religion, or belief.

I must draw your attention to one point which is very important: What you have just read is a discussion of Ch'an, not Ch'an itself. Ch'an meditation requires self-reliance and determined perseverance; it requires learning and practicing under a master worthy of your trust. If you do not practice the methods of Ch'an, then all that I have said is pointless. These pages will have succeeded only in adding

confusing ideas to your already confused mind, and will not have helped you in any way.

From the "Small I" to "No I"

1. What is Ch'an?

I wish to start by telling you that Ch'an is not the same as knowledge, yet knowledge is not completely apart from Ch'an. Ch'an is not religion, yet the achievements of religion can be reached through Ch'an. Ch'an is not philosophy, yet philosophy does not exceed the scope of Ch'an. Ch'an is not science, yet the spirit of emphasizing reality and experience is also required in Ch'an. Therefore, do not try to explore the content of Ch'an motivated solely by curiosity, for Ch'an is not something new brought here by Orientals. Ch'an is present everywhere, in space without limit and in time without end. However, before the Buddhism of the East came to this part of the world, the people of the West never knew of the existence of Ch'an. Furthermore, the Ch'an that is taught in the East and the West is not, in fact, the real Ch'an. It is the method to realize Ch'an.

Ch'an was first discovered by a prince named

Siddhartha Gautama (called Sakyamuni after his enlightenment), who was born in India about 2500 years ago. After he became enlightened and was called a "Buddha," he taught the method to realize Ch'an. This method was transmitted from India to China, and then to Japan. In India it is called "dhyana," which is pronounced "Ch'an" in Chinese, and "Zen" in Japanese. Actually, all three are identical.

Ch'an has universal and eternal existence. In this sense there is no need for any teacher to transmit it. What is taught by teachers are the methods by which one can directly experience Ch'an.

Some people mistakenly understand the experience of Ch'an to be mystical or mysterious. Others think that one can attain supernatural powers through the experience of Ch'an. Of course, in the long process of practicing Ch'an meditation one may experience strange mental and physical sensations. Also, through the practice of unifying body and mind, one may be able to attain the mental power to control or alter external phenomena. But such phenomena, which are looked upon as mysteries of religion, are not the aim of Ch'an practice, because they cannot solve the fundamental problems of people's lives. They only pique people's curiosity, and indeed they often generate more attachments and vexations.

Ch'an deals directly with the root of people's problems. It does not start with the idea of conquering the external social and material environments. It begins

with gaining thorough knowledge of your own "self." The moment you know what the self truly is, the "I" that you now take to be yourself simultaneously disappears. We call this experience "enlightenment" or "seeing one's self-nature," "true nature," or "original nature." It is the beginning of helping you to thoroughly and permanently solve your deepest and most fundamental problem: suffering stems from attachment. In the end, you will discover that although the whole of existence still exists, there is no longer any attachment to it.

It is only because you feel you have imperfections that you also feel the environment is imperfect. It is like a mirror with an uneven surface; if the glass is distorted, then the images reflected in it are also distorted. It is like the surface of water disturbed by ripples; the image of the moon reflected in it is irregular and unsettled. If the surface of the mirror is clear and smooth, or if the water is calm, then the reflection in the mirror and the moon in the water will be clear. Therefore, from the point of view of Ch'an, the major cause of pain and misfortune suffered by humanity is not the treacherous environment of the world in which we live, nor the dreadful actions of human society, but the fact that we have not been able to recognize our own original nature. The method of Ch'an does not direct us to evade reality, nor to shut our eyes to problems, like the ostrich that buries its head in the sand when an enemy approaches. Ch'an

is not self-hypnotizing idealism.

Through the practice of Ch'an, one can eliminate the "I"—not only the selfish, "small I," but also the "large I," which in philosophy is sometimes called Truth or the Essence. Only then is there absolute freedom. Thus an accomplished Ch'an practitioner never feels that any responsibility is a burden, nor does he feel the pressures of life that ordinary people feel. In his thoughts, words and actions he continuously generates vitality, spontaneity, wisdom and compassion. This is the expression of absolute freedom. Therefore, the life of an accomplished Ch'an practitioner is normal and positive, happy and unburdened, because the practice of Ch'an provides him with the means to "excavate" his precious pearl of wisdom.

The deeper one excavates, the higher the wisdom that is attained. Eventually one encompasses all the wisdom of the universe. There is nothing in all of time and space that is not contained within the scope of such wisdom. At this stage, wisdom becomes absolute. Since it is absolute, the term "wisdom" serves no further purpose. The "I" which motivated the practitioner to pursue such things as fame, wealth, and power, or to escape from suffering and danger has completely disappeared. Even the wisdom which eliminated the concept of "I" becomes unnecessary.

From the viewpoint of enlightenment it is easy for a Ch'an practitioner to reach this stage. Nevertheless,

one must exert a great deal of energy on the journey that leads to the gate of enlightenment. The methods of Ch'an are useless without effort.

2. The Three Stages of Ch'an Meditation:

The methods of meditation that I teach are divided into three stages:

Stage 1:

To balance the development of body and mind in order to attain mental and physical health.

With regard to the body, we stress proper postures and various physical exercises for walking, standing, sitting, and reclining. They are unique exercise methods combining Indian Hatha Yoga and Chinese *Tao-yin*. These exercises improve physical health and also help in meditation practice. Thus, one who practices Ch'an with good results will have a strong body capable of enduring hardship.

For the mind, we emphasize the elimination of impatience, suspicion, anxiety, fear, and frustration, so as to establish a state of self-confidence, determination, optimism, peace, and stability.

A good student, after five to ten lessons will reach the first stage and feel an improvement in his physical and mental health. One of my student's report states, "The beginner's Ch'an meditation class is especially

good for someone like myself, who, because of profession or habit, uses the brain every minute of the day. I find Ch'an sitting restful and soothing. Even if you have no greater aspirations in your practice than to achieve a more stable mind, the beginner's meditation class is useful and highly recommended."

In the first lesson of each class, I always ask each of the students his or her purpose for wanting to learn Ch'an. Most people answer that they are seeking help for the mind. It indicates that people live under heavy strain and pressure in the present environment, that they suffer excessive tension, and that they may have lost their mental balance. Many have already consulted psychologists. One of my students is an outstanding lecturer in a well-known university. She asked me in the first class if I could help to relieve her tense and uneasy moods. I told her that for a Ch'an practitioner it is a simple matter to solve. After five lessons she felt that Ch'an was a great blessing to her life.

The method of the first stage is simple. It requires you to relax all the muscles and nerves in the body, and concentrate your attention on the method of meditation. Because the tension of your muscles and nerves affects the activity of the brain, the key is to reduce the burden on your brain. When your wandering thoughts and illusions decrease, your brain will gradually begin to rest. Less blood will be needed by the brain, thus allowing for greater circulation

through the rest of the body. Also, as the brain relaxes, muscles relax as well, and blood vessels expand. You will feel comfortable, fresh and alert, and your mental responses will be lighter and quicker.

If one's goal is to acquire physical and mental balance, then one will probably feel that the attainment of the first stage of Ch'an practice is enough. However, many students are interested in the goal of the second stage.

Stage 2:

From the the "small I" to the "large I".

The first stage helps to concentrate the confused mind, but it doesn't eliminate scattered and illusory thoughts. Scattered thoughts continue to appear in the mind—sometimes they appear sporadically, and other times they appear wave after wave. Understand that if your reason for practicing Ch'an is mental and physical health and harmony, then your purpose is purely self-centered. In the first stage there is no mention of philosophical ideals or religious experience. The goal of the second stage of meditation is to liberate yourself from the narrow view of the "I." If you persistently practice the method taught by your teacher, you will gradually enlarge the sphere of the "small I" until it encompasses time and space and merges with the universe. Aside from being called Truth or Essence by Western philosophers, it is some-

times called Universal Mind, or Unified Mind, in Buddhism. At this stage, when you look inward the depth is limitless, and when you look outward the expanse is limitless. Since you have joined and become one with the universe, your own body and mind no longer exist. Only the universe exists, infinite in depth and expanse. You yourself are not only a part of the universe, but also the totality of it.

When you achieve this experience through your practice, you will understand what in philosophical terms is called "basic substance" and "phenomenal existence." All phenomena are the floating surface—the perceptible layer—of the basic substance. From the shallow point of view, all phenomena are unique and distinct. In reality, the differences between phenomena do not impair the totality of basic substance. For instance, on this planet there are countless kinds of animals, plants, minerals, gases, liquids, and solids—constantly arising, changing, and perishing—which constitute the phenomena of the earth. However, when viewed from space or another planet, Earth is a single entity.

When we free ourselves from the bonds of self and subjective views, and perceive the world with a unified mind, we eliminate opposing and contradictory views. If we look at the individual leaves and branches of a tree, they are distinct and separate. However, from the standpoint of the trunk and roots, all parts are one unified whole.

In the course of the second stage, you have realized that you not only have an independent individual existence, but you also have a universal existence together with the infinite cosmos, and therefore confrontation between you and the environment disappears. Discontent, hatred, love, desire—thoughts, words and actions governed by desire or aversion—disappear naturally, to be replaced by tranquility and contentment. Because you have eliminated the selfish “small I,” you are able to look upon all people and all things as if they are phenomena produced from your own substance, and so you will love all people and all things in the same way you loved and watched over your “small I.” This is the mind of a great philosopher or genuine religious leader.

All great religious figures have experienced the fruit of the second stage of practice, where they free themselves from the confines of the “small I” and discover that their own basic substance is none other than the existence of the entire universe. All phenomena are manifestations of their own nature; there is no difference between themselves and the universe. They feel they have the duty to love and watch over all things as well as the right to manage them, just as we have the duty to love our own children and the right to manage the property that belongs to us. The relationship between such a person and the world is equivalent to what we consider to be the relationship between the deity and the multitude of creation.

Such individuals are a personification of the basic substance of the universe, and it is they who inspire the belief in God. They exemplify, and therefore substantiate, the idea of a "large I"—the self-love of God—and invent the mission of being a savior of the world or an emissary of God. They clearly perceive the unity of all phenomena, and look upon all things and sentient beings as sacred objects of creation that are to be watched over or saved. Consequently, some religious figures think that the basic nature of their soul is the same as that of the deity, and that they are human incarnations of the deity. They consider themselves to be saviors of the world. Others think that, although the basic nature of their souls is not identical to and inseparable from the deity, their profound spiritual experience shows that they were sent to this world by God as messengers to promulgate God's intention.

Generally, when philosophers or religious figures reach the height of the second stage, they feel their wisdom is unlimited, their power infinite, and their beings eternal. When the scope of the "I" enlarges, self-confidence accordingly becomes stronger; this stronger self-confidence is in fact the unlimited escalation of a sense of superiority and pride. It is therefore termed "large I," and does not mean that absolute freedom from vexations has been achieved.

Stage 3:

From "large I" to "no I":

When one reaches the height of the second stage, he realizes the concept of the "I" does not exist. But he has only abandoned the "small I" and has not negated the concept of basic substance or the existence of God—you may call it Truth, God, the Almighty, the Unchanging Principle, or even the Buddha of Buddhism. If you think that it is real, then you are still in the realm of the "large I" and have not surpassed the sphere of philosophy and religion.

I must emphasize that the content of Ch'an does not appear until the third stage. Ch'an is unimaginable. It is neither a concept nor a feeling. Ordinarily, the proper path leading to Ch'an is through meditation. Once you have arrived at the door of Ch'an, even the method of meditation is rendered useless. It is like using various modes of transportation on a long journey, and at the end of the journey finding a steep cliff in front of you. It is so high you cannot see its top, and so wide its sides cannot be found. At this time a person who has been to the other side of the cliff comes to tell you that on the other side lies the world of Ch'an. When you scale it, you will enter Ch'an. Yet, he also tells you not to depend on any means of transportation to fly over, bypass, or penetrate through it because it is infinity itself. There is no way to scale it.

Even an outstanding Ch'an master who has helped

a student to this place is no longer useful. Although the master has been to the other side, he cannot take another there with him, just as a mother's own eating and drinking cannot take the hunger away from the child who refuses to eat or drink. At that time, the only thing the master can do is advise you to discard all experiences, knowledge, and all things and ideas that you think are reliable, important and real, including the hope to enter the world of Ch'an. It is as if you wanted to enter a sacred building. Before you do so, a guard tells you that you must not carry any weapon, that you must take off all your clothes, and that in fact, you must leave behind your body and soul. Only then can you enter.

Because Ch'an is a world where there is no self, there is no way you can enter it if you have any attachments in your mind. Therefore, Ch'an is the territory of the wise and courageous. Without wisdom, a person would not believe that another world could appear before him after he has abandoned all attachments. Without courage, a person would find it impossible to discard everything he has accumulated in his life: ideals and knowledge, spiritual and material possessions.

You may ask what benefit you will get after making such great sacrifices to enter the world of Ch'an. The truth is, you cannot enter the world of Ch'an while this question is still with you. Looking for benefit, either for self or for others, is in the realm of

the "small I" or "large I." The Sixth Patriarch of the Ch'an sect in China taught people that the way to enter the realm of Ch'an enlightenment is this: "Neither think of good nor think of evil." You must eliminate opposing views such as self and other, inner and outer, being and non-being, large and small, good and bad, vexation and wisdom, illusion and enlightenment, false and true, or suffering of birth and death and joy of emancipation. Only then can you be "reborn" into the realm of Ch'an.

The new life you discover once you enter the door of Ch'an has been with you all along, yet you cannot know it unless you drop all attachments. In the Ch'an sect we call it "your original face before you were born." This is not the "small I" of the body and mind, nor the "large I" of the world and universe. This is absolute freedom, freedom from the misery of all vexations and bonds.

To enter the realm of Ch'an is not easy. Many people have studied and meditated for decades, yet have never gained entrance to the door of Ch'an. It will not be difficult, however, when your causes and conditions mature, or if you have a good Ch'an master who is able to guide you with full attention. Such a master may adopt attitudes or use actions and verbal expressions that seem ridiculous, but these are all expedient means to help you achieve your goal faster. When the master does tell you that you have now entered the gate, you will suddenly realize that there

is no gate to Ch'an. Before entering you cannot see where the gate is, and after entering you find the gate to be non-existent. Otherwise, there would be a distinction between inside and outside, the enlightened and the ignorant. If any distinctions remain, then it is still not Ch'an.

When you are in the second stage, although you feel that the "small I" does not exist, the basic substance of the universe or the Supreme Truth still exists for you. Although you recognize that all phenomena are the extension of the basic substance or Supreme Truth, there still exists an opposition between the basic substance and external phenomena. Not until the distinctions of all phenomena disappear, and everything returns to Truth, will you have absolute peace and unity. As long as the world of phenomena is still active, you cannot do away with conflict and suffering. Therefore, although philosophers and religious figures perceive the peace of the original substance, they still cannot eliminate the confusion of phenomena.

One who has entered Ch'an does not see basic substance and phenomena as two things standing in opposition to each other. They cannot be compared to the palm and back of the hand. All phenomena are basic substance, and apart from phenomena there is no basic substance to be found. The reality of basic substance exists right in the unreality of the phenomena, which change ceaselessly and have no constant

forms. This is the Truth. When you experience that phenomena are unreal, you will then be free from the concept of self and other, right and wrong, and free from the vexations of greed, hatred, ignorance, worry, and pride. You will not need to search for peace and purity, and you will not detest evil vexations and impurity. Although you live in the world of phenomenal reality, to you any environment is Buddha's Pure Land. To an unenlightened person, you are an ordinary person. To you, all ordinary people are identical with Buddha. You will feel that your own self-nature is the same as that of all Buddhas, and the self-nature of Buddhas is universal throughout time and space. You will spontaneously apply your wisdom and merit, giving to all sentient beings everywhere, throughout all time and space.

What I have said reveals a small part of the feeling of one who has entered the enlightened realm of Ch'an, as well as the path which one follows in order to depart from the "large I" and arrive at the stage of "no I." Nevertheless, a newly enlightened person who has just entered the realm of Ch'an is still at the beginning of his journey. He is like one who has just had his first sip of wine. He knows its taste now, but the wine will not remain in his mouth forever. The purpose of Ch'an is not just to let you take one sip, but to have your entire life merge with and dissolve in the wine, even to the point that you forget the existence of yourself and the wine. After tasting the first sip of

egolessness, how much farther must one travel? What kinds of things remain to be seen? I will save that for another time.

Kung-an

The *kung-ans* (*koans*) that have been handed down to the present consist of the sayings, instructions, and dialogues of Ch'an masters and their students. The word "sayings" does not refer exclusively to verbal communication, for it sometimes happened that the master or student said nothing at all. The expression that "the Ch'an sect does not rely on language" not only means written and spoken language, but all other forms of communication as well. The actions and sayings in the *kung-ans* only hint at, but do not directly give the answers.

For someone without sufficient knowledge of Ch'an or an understanding of the special quality of this type of practice, *kung-ans* will often seem to be a dialogue between two or more insane people. Generally speaking, the *kung-ans* which can be understood and are somewhat clear are the most shallow, while the ones which are puzzling and obscure are deeper. There are many levels of enlightenment, and the dialogues between Ch'an masters and their students often represent this.

Yesterday a student asked me, "Will the student be

able to distinguish the various levels of enlightenment and will his Shih-fu (master) be able to know when he has advanced?"

I answered, "If a student doesn't make any progress, then of course he doesn't feel anything, but if he indeed has made some progress, the difference between levels will be distinct. It's as distinct as the difference between single life and married life. The student should be able to know whether he has made a genuine step or not, and the Shih-fu, of course, should also be able to tell. If he cannot tell, then he is not a good Shih-fu."

Furthermore, a person who has had a deep enlightenment experience can usually tell at which level or depth a particular *kung-an* is at. Even within the same *kung-an*, one sentence may refer to one level and another sentence to another level.

As the Ch'an sect often emphasizes, and as I myself have said many times, before a person enters the door of Ch'an, he works relentlessly and diligently. He reaches the stage where he does not know what he is eating or drinking, does not feel like sleeping, does not see what is in front of him, and does not hear what can be heard. Yet he still hasn't entered the door of Ch'an. We call this stage "ignoring reality." After he enters the door for the first time, he returns to a more normal mental state. His ego, as well as any feelings of inferiority, will be greatly diminished.

In one *kung-an* the question is asked: "What are

nuns made out of?" The answer is given: "Nuns are made out of women." This is a common answer. If it comes from an average person there's nothing particularly unique about it, but if it comes from one who has practiced hard, then it actually indicates that he has experienced enlightenment. Is it a deep level of enlightenment? Not necessarily. During the retreat, one of my students, after hours of hard practice, finally got through the door. I asked her, "Where are you?"

She answered, "I am here."

"What are you sitting on?" I further questioned her.

She replied, "I'm sitting on the chair." This was not a deep level of enlightenment, but nonetheless she had entered the door of Ch'an. She moved from "ignoring reality" to a more normal state.

During this year's retreat, I gave a *kung-an* to another student, and said, "If you give me the same answer you gave me last year, I'm going to whack you with the incense staff, since it will indicate that you have not made any progress." Last year, I held up the incense staff and asked her, "What is this?"

She answered, "An incense staff." This year, sure enough, she gave me the same answer, so I scolded her. At the next interview, I held up the incense staff again, and asked, "What is this?" This time she was hesitant since she did not want to give the same answer. She thought for a while and then said, "It's

Buddha-nature." Hearing this, I whacked her with the staff.

By ordinary standards, to say it is an incense staff is correct. From the point of view of Buddhism, to say it is Buddha-nature is also correct. However, this answer came from her intellect and not directly from her practice, and therefore she deserved a scolding.

There was another student who, after working hard for a few days, came in for an interview. I picked up a wild flower and asked him, "What is this?"

He answered, "A flower."

"What color is it?" "Yellow." At that answer, I scolded him. He grew indignant, saying that it was indeed a yellow flower.

I tapped him sharply and said, "This is neither a flower nor is it yellow."

After working hard for another day and a half without any sleep, he came in for another interview. This time I held a dry twig which I had picked up from the ground outside. He took the twig from me, then handed it back, saying, "I have nothing to say."

I said, "Okay. Make three prostrations," thus indicating to him that he had achieved a level of comprehension.

In this example, I told a student that a yellow flower was neither a flower nor yellow. In this respect I am not a good Shih-fu because by saying this I saved that student three years of hard work. Afterwards, I asked him, "Was it easy for you to enter the door?"

He answered, "No."

"Without Shih-fu would it have been possible for you to enter the door?"

"Impossible."

Actually, I have been extremely generous to my students, giving them hints and guidelines to help them enter the door more quickly, so that they can have a small taste of Ch'an. However, the levels these student have reached are shallow. I constantly remind them of this fact and exhort them to refrain from pride. At this stage, even though their faith is established and will not regress, it is still possible for their practice to regress if they do not continue to work hard.

On the sixth day of one retreat a student received a hint from another monk. Whether this monk had himself entered the door of Ch'an or not, I do not know. The monk said, "An egg and a rock knocked against each other: the rock was broken and the egg was intact." Unfortunately, the student was unable to make use of this hint to reach a deeper level. Another example of this type of *kung-an* is: "A man is walking on a bridge: the bridge flows, but the water does not." This type of *kung-an* is somewhat puzzling, but if we were to advance to a deeper level of insight, these *kung-ans* too would seem normal.

These are living *kung-ans*. Few of you can understand the meaning behind them. They may even appear somewhat crazy. However, you should not

believe that by pretending to be crazy you will get my approval. There's really no way to pretend; if you try, I'll whack you as soon as you enter the interview room and throw you out. Some time ago one of my students came to see me. Looking directly into my eyes with boldness in his own, he said, "Shih-fu, you can test me." After he said this, I just looked back at him, so he said again, "You can test me." I returned his gaze in silence, and then he lowered his head. Then I said to him, "You have courage, but you haven't worked hard. You'll never enter the door this way."

The practice should proceed in this way: one begins at the normal, everyday stage. After working hard, everything suddenly becomes abnormal. Then, after a life-and-death struggle, one enters the door of Ch'an and again sees everything as normal. But do not be misled. This "normal" is quite different from the normal of the person at the first stage. And even though the practitioner's mind is quite clear at this point, he should continue with his practice until he reaches another abnormal stage.

Kung-ans such as "Where are you?" and "I am here" are representative of the normal stage just after one enters the door, whereas the "egg and rock" type of *kung-an* is representative of the second abnormal stage. This second abnormal stage is then followed by a still deeper normal stage. Ch'an masters have charted the stages of progress one should pass

through in various ways. Some speak of passing three major barriers; others set up four stages, whereas others speak of five levels. However, these are rough classifications. Generally speaking, a person will go through tens or even hundreds of changes from abnormal to normal, from negation to affirmation and then back again, before reaching perfection. If you want to accomplish this in one lifetime, then you must sincerely practice with single-minded devotion for your entire life.

How is it possible for the practice of Ch'an to change human concepts and attitudes? It is possible because the practice uses extreme pressure to uncover and completely utilize a person's hidden mental power. It's the same thing as physical power. We know we have a lot of hidden physical power that can surface under extreme pressure. For example, under ordinary circumstances a person may not be able to jump far or run fast, but if a tiger is chasing him he suddenly finds the strength to jump much farther and run faster than he ever thought possible. A person standing beneath a collapsing wall suddenly finds the strength to push the wall back. Things like this do occur. The person does not know where it comes from, but the strength is found to do it. The practice of Ch'an is a method for putting a practitioner in a desperate mental situation, thereby forcing him to use this hidden power to save himself.

I use the following approach when teaching my

students. A student must first attain a certain degree of concentration. If he cannot concentrate, then he cannot even begin to practice Ch'an. After he attains a certain degree of concentration he has to keep going to a stage similar to *samadhi* (mental absorption), or what is usually referred to as meditation. It is only at this stage, when one's mental power is focused and no other thoughts are present, that one is ready to work on Ch'an, or to use the Chinese expression, to *Ts'an Ch'an*.

The spirit which the *kung-an* expresses is the unity of the person and the Dharma. What is meant by Dharma? Dharma is what was experienced by Sakyamuni Buddha when he attained full enlightenment under the Bodhi tree. Dharma cannot be described. It is everywhere. In the practice of Ch'an, one's mind and Dharma must be in harmony in order for one to generate the power or energy of Dharma. What is said in *kung-ans* may seem absurd, yet it truly corresponds to Dharma and issues forth from Dharma, for the master's mind is one with Dharma. This is why it is so important to have a Shih-fu, for a Shih-fu represents the living Dharma. On retreats I tell my students that they should be grateful to their Shih-fu and prostrate to me. When they prostrate to me, I tell them, "You are prostrating to Shih-fu, not to Sheng-yen. Sheng-yen happens to be in the role of a Shih-fu representing the Dharma. In fact, you are prostrating to the living Dharma." When the Dharma,

the Shih-fu, and the student completely harmonize, the student will experience enlightenment.

Ch'an Sickness

Most people form false attachments to self, others, sentient beings, and life. These bonds result from an attachment to a sense of self. This discussion will be divided into three sections. In the first, we shall examine how attachment to the sense of individuality, which results from the four misconceptions named above, is manifested in the practitioner's behavior. In the second, we will talk about the experienced practitioner, especially the conduct that aid his progress. In the third section, we will provide a general description of the appropriate attitude a practitioner should possess throughout the course of his practice.

People who have achieved results from practice, and who have practiced for many years, may feel that they have reached the stage of pure wisdom, where all attachment to self is terminated and Nirvana is achieved. Actually, anyone who thinks that he has become enlightened really has not. Such a person still possesses a sense of self, because he thinks that there is a self to be enlightened.

Enlightenment is neither an object, nor a feeling, nor a state to be entered. Were enlightenment any of

these, it would be limited and thus illusory. As long as enlightenment is seen as an objective, and as long as there is a self to benefit from enlightenment, wisdom is still far away.

After hearing what I have just said, you may think that you understand. But it is difficult for a beginner to appreciate the feeling of liberation which results from experiencing enlightenment directly. Suppose that after much practice you experienced the feeling of disappearance of self. On such an occasion tremendous bliss would well up in you, and you might exclaim, "Truly, my self has disappeared completely. I have entered Nirvana." But you really have not done so. Since there is still a sense of self to enter Nirvana, the final achievement is still unrealized. Such an experience, however, is so powerful that it is likely to mislead even the most experienced practitioner.

This experience of bliss is one example of the misconceptions that result from false attachment to self. Let us now examine a second example. Suppose a practitioner reaches the stage in which self-centeredness ends and the method of practice dissolves. He will feel entirely relaxed and free, unified with the universe, yet unconcerned with its relation to him, because his sense of self is gone. His state is not one of exultation, but rather of perfect ease; he will not jump with delight nor will he shout that he has entered Nirvana. But the self still exists, no matter what the practitioner may feel he has experienced.

Once the initial joy and power fades from such an experience, the practitioner may assert that he understands Nirvana, that he has seen the Dharma body of the Buddha, and that he has attained final wisdom. If you, who have not yet attained the meditative skill of this person, attempt to contradict him, saying, "You're talking nonsense, and playing games with ghosts," he would likely overcome your argument in debate. Such a practitioner is strongly attached to his achievement. He will be frustrated when you do not believe what he says. He may respond by saying, "You haven't experienced what I have, so you don't know what you are talking about." To make matters worse, there may be another person who is willing to affirm what this practitioner claims, perhaps because this other person feels that his own experience and his description of Nirvana accord perfectly with descriptions found in the *sutras*. This bystander may say that, because he has known the experiences described by the other practitioner, he is in a position to affirm their validity. This will make the first practitioner happy. He will think that the person who supports what he says is his true Dharma friend.

Entering Nirvana results in liberation. What kind of liberation, then, does this practitioner possess, who responds to praise with delight and to insult with frustration? It would seem that his Nirvana is weak and fragile. Perhaps our hypothetical practitioner might respond to this conclusion in this way: "I may

respond to praise and criticism in different ways, but I do not do so to please myself. Since I am quite free from the self, I really do not care at all. But in order to uphold the dignity of the Buddhadharma, I censure those who conflict with the Dharma and praise those who are in accord with it." What can we reply to this? It would be impossible to judge such a person's achievement. What is important is his own enlightenment experience. If as a result of this experience he feels, "Yes! I have entered Nirvana and lost myself! I have tremendous wisdom," then he has not entered Nirvana. Nirvana is entered only if both Nirvana and Samsara (as well as time) disappear; it is entered only if there is no more feeling of happiness and sorrow, and if the mind is utterly stable and tranquil.

Even enlightenment is said to be a dream. But if both enlightenment and Samsara are equally illusory, then the practitioner seems to be engaged in the dispiriting process of struggling to leave one dream only to enter another. Actually, enlightenment itself is not a dream, but the concept of enlightenment as well as its attainment is a dream. Thus, sentient beings in Samsara are living in a dream with a concept of enlightenment that is really nothing more than an object of grasping. Once they actually reach enlightenment, enlightenment is no longer a dream. Indeed, enlightenment ceases to exist. When genuine enlightenment is entered, it disappears.

A practitioner's progress can be likened to someone

trying to climb a mountain made of glass. The mountain is very steep and slippery. The mountaineer is barefoot, and to make matters worse, the mountain is covered with oil. Every time he makes an effort to climb, he slips. The mountaineer is persistent, however, and he tries again and again, until, utterly exhausted, he collapses into a deep sleep. When he awakens, the mountaineer discovers the mountain is completely gone. He realizes that all his effort was but a dream, and that there was no need to climb, for there was no progress to be made. In the dream, however, the mountain did exist, and if he had not attempted the impossible in his dream—to scale the mountain—he would not have been able to awaken from his dream. Thus, in the practice of Buddhadharma, it is necessary to try to leave Samsara and achieve Nirvana, even though they, as well as the desire to leave one and enter the other, are illusory. If in the course of your practice you experience such states of self-enlightenment, then know that you are still only dreaming.

So far we have treated those who feel they have achieved enlightenment in relation to an existing self. In our third example, we will examine the reverse perspective, which is equally false. In this case, the practitioner asserts that he is indifferent to praise and blame, to the affairs of the world, and even to his own practice, because he has understood that there is neither Nirvana nor a self to enter Nirvana, and that

there is no world other than meaningless illusion. This attitude is also wrong, and is perhaps more dangerous for the practitioner than either of the two misconceptions already described. In the two previous examples, the practitioner may attain the various heavenly states after death, those states attainable through meditation (*dhyana*). But this third practitioner is tempted by his misconceptions to stop practicing. Were he to persevere in practice, he would be in the fortunate position to enter the formless heavens. On the other hand, if he were to cease practicing because he felt that everything is illusion, he would fall into the animal realms after death. Neither the heaven nor the human realms would be open to him. He would fall because of ignorance.

These three kinds of misconceptions should not be viewed as extraordinary; it is easy for a diligent practitioner to experience the conditions described above. Thus, it is important to have a master who can guide his students away from such pitfalls. Without a guide, the practitioner is likely to travel along a deviant path, though the person is convinced he is practicing *Buddhadharma*.

Selecting and Studying Under a Master

Sakyamuni Buddha once remarked that the depth of a Buddha's wisdom and the extent of his merit are ascertainable only by one who has himself reached Buddhahood. It is similarly true that the practice of a master can be assessed only by one who is himself a master. A student, consequently, cannot measure the extent of a master's attainment. The most he can do is acquaint himself with the correct view of Buddhadharma and make sure that the master teaches this view.

Three fundamental principles make up the right view of Buddhadharma. They are the principles of causes and conditions, of causes and consequences, and of the middle way, which means the path between extremes. Let us examine each of these.

Buddhadharma explains that all things, being illusory and without self-nature, are utterly dependent on causes and conditions for their appearance. Cause and consequence are said to be inextricably related over time, such that no action in the past, present, or

future can be separated from its corresponding cause and consequence. Further, all extremes, such as clinging to emptiness or existence, are false and illusory, and thus the only recourse is the middle path, which remains free from all extremes.

The student must be wary of false views. Some teachers hold that there are eternally existent *dharma*s. Theists, for instance, hold that there exists an eternal soul perpetually under the governance of an eternal God. Others believe that the *dharma*s of cause and effect are unrelated through time. They say that events occur only randomly. Materialists admit cause and effect only in relation to actions within the physical world, where the relationship between an effect and its cause is experimentally verifiable. But they deny the notion of a karmic law of cause and effect that rules all planes of existence, not just the physical.

Any master whose teaching are consistent with this correct view of Buddhadharma must be considered to have met at least the minimum requirement of the true master. Hence, in selecting a master, students should concern themselves only with correct view. They should not bother about the master's character and conduct.

Usually, however, this is not the case. Many students judge the master by his behavior, watching with eagle eyes for any inconsistencies between the master's teachings and actions. This creates problems. If there is any discrepancy between the master's avowed

standards and what the master himself does, then the practitioner gradually comes to perceive only the master's failings and ultimately distrusts the teachings he has received. Not only will he stop practicing, he will likely lose all faith in the Dharma as well.

The master is always subject to criticism by his disciples. Because he is enlightened, he does not need to remain in society, but he does so for the good of those mired in delusion. While functioning in society, he will necessarily betray his weaknesses. Like anyone else, he must eat, urinate, defecate, wear clothes, and walk down the street. As a result, many people look at masters in astonishment. They exclaim, "My God! He eats food? How could he be a real master if he eats food just like we do? He goes to the bathroom just like us. How can he be just like us?"

Although a master may appear to suffer from the same failings as his disciples, it should be understood that the mind of the master is pure. Were it impure, there would be defects in his teaching of the Dharma.

Masters in some religions prefer to hide their personal lives. You will never see them sleeping, eating, or using the bathroom. The master is only seen sitting in appropriate surroundings, wearing magnificent robes, looking splendid, pure, and somber. He looks like God's representative.

I often say that you should never think of me as a god or as a Bodhisattva. I am exactly the same as all of you. I eat food when I am hungry. I also sleep like

everyone else. In fact, I believe that I snore, but I am not certain since I cannot listen to myself while sleeping.

Once during the last retreat while everyone was participating in the evening service, I went to pick up one of the implements used in the ceremony, but, because I was exhausted, I dropped it. My thought at that time was that it is definitely best not to be a master once you have grown old because the body ceases to listen to the commands of the mind. If disciples see apparent carelessness in their master, they will proceed to imitate this fault. Of course, if while performing a ceremony everyone started dropping things and making mistakes, I would get angry. I may make mistakes, but this is not conduct for my disciples to follow.

Even if the master tells lies, steals, or chases women though knowing perfectly well that such actions are contrary to the Vinaya (the canon of Buddhist precepts)—even if he does so in full view of his students—he should still be considered a true master as long as he scolds his disciples when they commit transgressions, and, of course, as long as he teaches the correct view of Buddhadharma. Such a master will undoubtedly reap the bad consequences of his transgressions, but this is his concern and no one else's.

Most disciples cannot understand this, so trouble arises. It is worst for those disciples who are completely blind to the purpose of practice and who study

with the master only because others do. Instead of paying attention to the teaching, they focus on the master's conduct and imitate it. If the master breaks certain precepts, so do they. The difference is that they carry their infractions far beyond those of the master. Thus if the master transgresses the precepts fifty percent of the time, they will do so sixty percent or more. If the master curses someone, these disciples will immediately begin cursing others. If the master insists that, unlike himself, his disciples are not permitted to commit wrongs, then these disciples will say, "I can do this, but you others cannot." Blind and directionless, they do not grasp the correct view, so their load of bad karma grows heavier.

The moral problems we now hear about in the United States regarding Buddhist students and masters are not unprecedented. These problems have occurred since the time of Sakyamuni Buddha. During the lifetime of the Buddha, for example, there lived a man called Devadatta, whose prescriptions for the precepts were even stricter than those of Sakyamuni, and who himself had a large following of disciples. He accused the Buddha of laxity.

Which man's teaching was right? It is a question of correct view. Sakyamuni neither forbid nor promoted the bitter ascetic practices taught by Devadatta. He said only that the ascetic life is useful for minds mired in confusion, but unnecessary in other instances. Sakyamuni's view, then, was centered in the middle

way: indulging neither in the extreme of asceticism nor in that of hedonism. Devadatta's view, however, was rigidly ascetic. From the perspective of correct view of Buddhadharma, it is Sakyamuni's standpoint which is preferable.

Throughout the history of Buddhism, there have been frequent debates about which is more important: holding the correct view or keeping the precepts. There is an aphorism in the Ch'an Sect that instructs the practitioner to prize the correct view above all, and to be relaxed about the precepts. If a student were to put this into practice, he would probably break many precepts. This would be wrong. Actually, the attitude suggested by the aphorism should be adopted only in relation to the master: the student should treasure the master's teaching, but look lightly at any of his failings in conduct.

A master's misdemeanors are symptoms of his own weakness or illness. The disciple should not mimic or adopt such failings and habits. The student need only find a master whose teachings are in accord with Buddhadharma. Thereafter, it is the student's duty to apply the teachings to his life, and to his life alone. If he accomplishes this, he will have achieved much.

No Anger or Love Between Master and Disciple

A practitioner should not feel proud if a master thinks highly of him, wishes to accept him as a student, and shows affection for him. Or if he is driven away by the master, the disciple should feel no hatred. Similarly, the master should not feel proud, even if he is surrounded by many disciples. Nor should he feel unhappy if all his disciples leave; each has his own reasons for departing.

Maintaining this attitude of equanimity is not easy. An ordinary person will find it difficult to be impartial when he considers his own merits. He will be reluctant to see his own faults for what they are, or he may be prone to knock his genuinely good points. Although they may seem different, self-deprecation and pride are really the same thing.

Self-deprecation usually stems from a feeling of insecurity or worthlessness. This insecurity can have a negative effect if it leads you to conclude: "What can a person like me accomplish? I can't do anything."

Insecurity can also work in a positive direction. It may encourage you to strive toward your goals, attain

riches and fame, and gain self-respect. Then you may feel, "What I have done is not easy to do. Other people are not as good as I am because they cannot equal my achievement." This is pride.

A boss of a company might say to his employees, "Before you ask for a raise, consider this: You wouldn't be working if it weren't for me. You depend on my intelligence and my effort. When you reach my level, then you can come and bargain with me." This boss is overly proud.

Spiritual masters may also be proud. A master might say, "I have practiced for many, many years; I have followed many spiritual masters in my time. Now I have reached my ultimate attainment. But you, my disciples, have not reached that state. You are far below my level of attainment. You must still go a long way before you achieve what I have." This master's attitude shows pride, does it not?

A Ch'an master may act like a dictator. But this attitude alone is not sufficient proof that the master is proud. The question is whether the master feels pride within himself. Once I was riding with two of my disciples, a man and his wife. They asked me, "Have you had any problems recently?"

I responded, "As far as I am concerned, there are no problems."

The husband did not reply, but the wife said, "Shih-fu, as soon as I saw you, I knew that you were proud. There are always problems. As the saying goes,

'Unless you've been through it, you can't understand what the problem is.' So how can you always avoid problems?" In other words, my disciples saw pride in me.

I shall explain my attitude. If I set about to do something, any obstacles I encounter when I perform the task do not appear as problems to me. If a thing can be accomplished, there is no difficulty in doing it, in spite of obstacles that may arise. If there is something I know I cannot accomplish, like giving birth to a child, I do not waste my time trying to do it. Therefore, I have no problems. Thus to truly see pride and insecurity in someone, you must look closely at the individual's motivation rather than his action.

Suppose the number of people who come to the Ch'an Center equalled the number of people who go to Hare Krishna and T.M. Centers. I might say, "Before, I couldn't compete with these groups, but now I am catching up with them." This is pride because I am competing with others and comparing myself to them.

We really should not compare ourselves with others. It is not necessary. If you compare yourself with another, you will usually find that he is either shorter or taller than you are. Even if you happen to be the same height, you might still look to see if the other is skinnier or fatter than you!

Once I watched a girl walking down the street. As she walked, she was watching another girl on the other side of the street. She looked at the other girl's

beautiful clothes, then she looked at her own dress. She noticed how the girl walked, and then she watched herself walk. She was impressed by the other girl, so she compared the other's beautiful clothes and elegant movement to her own clothes and way of walking. If you compare, you will either feel insecure or proud. In this case, the girl felt insecure, but had her clothes and walk been better than the other's, she would have felt pride instead.

In Chinese history, during the Spring and Autumn period, in a country called Yueh, there was a quest to find the most beautiful woman in the land. The title was awarded to a woman named Hsi-shih, whose renown is equal to that of Helen of Troy in the West. Hsi-shih suffered from a malady in her chest. Every time she had chest pains, she would press her palms to her heart, frowning and moaning. Everyone agreed that at those moments she looked even more beautiful. Also living in Yueh at that time was Tung-shih, the ugliest girl in the land. When she saw how everyone admired Hsi-shih's beauty, she pretended to have chest pains also. Grimacing and groaning, she pressed her hands to her heart. However, her imitation was a failure. Everyone agreed that she looked uglier than ever.

Learn, therefore, not to compare yourself to other people. Almost everyone at one time or another will say, "I am really no good." But when you say this, you are secretly wishing that people will praise you. In the

same mood you might feel that those around you are unfriendly and you deserve their unfriendliness. But suppose someone came up to you and said, "In many ways you're really a good person!" How would you then feel? You may change your tune and think: "I do have good qualities after all." There is no ordinary person who does not enjoy praise, who does not seek the approval of other. Even animals act in this way. If you have a dog, it will be happy if you praise it. But if you scold it, you might spoil its whole day.

In ordinary people, pride and insecurity are to be expected. It is the extremes which are dangerous. If you feel totally useless, like a piece of garbage, then your insecurity may lead to suicide. If you are bloated with pride to the point where you feel omniscient and omnipotent, then you may become another Hitler, Stalin, or Mao Tse-tung.

A Ch'an master, if anything, is more likely to feel pride than insecurity, because one could not become a master if one were insecure. Someone who felt inferior would say, "How can I be your master? I'm not good enough to be a master and teach others." Such a person has no confidence in himself.

Self-respect, however, is a normal feeling that develops in the course of practice. Indeed, you should experience it. Self-respect is a sign that your faith is growing stronger. As a result of practice, you gradually come to see things in people and sentient beings that others miss, and from this recognition springs

compassion. A practitioner feels that all people are unfortunate, and as a result of his compassion, he wishes to save them all.

It is the duty of the master to teach his followers to practice so that they may leave their state of ignorance. But the more that people come to him, the heavier he finds the weight of his responsibility, and the greater his mission.

But some people approach the master in a negative manner. Such a person may say, "I have followed many masters and studied with them, and none of them has really helped me. I have learned everything I know by myself. In fact, they owe me gratitude. It's people like me who give them the idea that they are masters."

A student might also say, "I am quite content here in the ocean of Samsara. If you, who are a master, want to carrying me out of it, that is your concern. It has nothing to do with me. Why should I thank you?" Is this the correct attitude?

A Ch'an master seeks nobody's gratitude. Gratitude is what the disciple should feel. If a master who directs disciples' practice feels proud because they are grateful and make prostrations to him, he is increasing his own obstructions. A master wants his disciples to feel grateful for themselves and their own practice, not for him, because the more gratitude a disciple feels, the more benefit the practice can bring him.

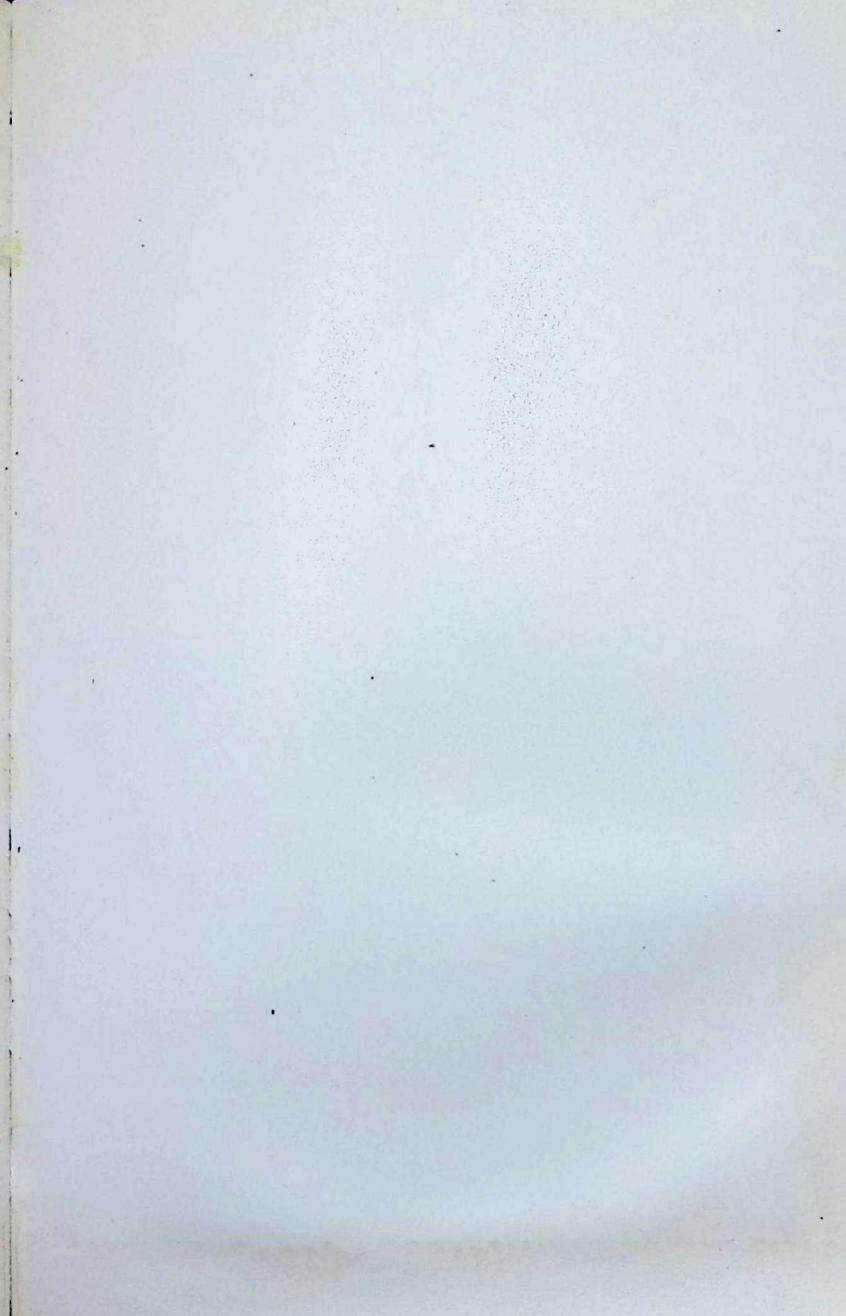
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